1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

Pin Point

PIN POINT, A NEGRO COMMUNITY ABOUT NINE MILES southeast of Savannah, is scattered over some twenty or thirty acres on a peninsula overlooking Shipyard Creek. Many of the small wooden cabins are neatly whitewashed and are half hidden by shrubbery and spreading oaks. Flowers and vegetables are planted in the most advantageous sunny spots near the houses and most of the yards are enclosed by picket fences, giving a cozy and pleasant privacy. The lanes, little more than wagon tracks, twist in and out and across the settlement. The informal and haphazard scattering of the houses, with high shrubbery bordering the lanes, gives an effect that is pleasing and unusual.

Pin Point has a church, a pavilion on the tidewater creek, and a crab cannery. The men and women who do not work as domestic servants at the nearby country places find employment in the crab cannery or fish and crab and shrimp for themselves. The life is quiet, soothed by the smell of the salt marsh.

It is only when some great excitement takes place, a stirring religious service, a dance at the community pavilion, a death,[37b, c] or some scandal concerning a neighbor, that quiet Pin Point bestirs itself. Recently, one of the fishermen ventured into the foreign waters of the Ogeechee about ten miles distant and there he was almost devoured by an alligator. All that was left of him, "the ham," was given a burial [2] amid the loud lamentations of his relatives and neighbors.

The people are, almost without exception, black or dark

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

skinned, proud, upstanding and loyal, suspicious of strangers but generous and trusting to friends (Plate VIII, IX, X). Most of the very old inhabitants have died in the past decade, so that to have reached the age of sixty places a man or woman in the patriarchal class. The grown people between twenty-five and thirty, are still close to the traditions and beliefs in which they have been reared. Firmly believing in the Bible, they still are aware of other beliefs and customs handed down by their parents and grandparents.

A pleasant, intelligent woman * of about forty-five chatted with us. "Cose, det is duh will ub God, but dey do say jis duh same wen a pusson die, 'Maybe somebody fix em' [15] aw 'I sho know dat uhmun wuz rooted.' I ain nebuh bought no powduh muhsef but jis day befo yestuhdy a uhmun frum Tatemville wuz right yuh tuh dis house sellin High John duh Conqueruh fuh fifty cent an she sho say it would bring yuh powuhful good luck, but I ain hab fifty cent.[8]

"Cose, it ain good tuh fool much wid dem tings, but yuh sho hab tuh be keahful not tuh let no enemy git hole uh yuh haiah combins cuz dey say dey sho could fix yuh den." [10] She laughed a little uneasily. "Ef yuh dream ub a snake dassa enemy neahby too, but ef yuh weah a snake skin roun yuh wais, it good fuh wut ail yuh.[504.] * An ef uh enemy come tuh yuh house an yuh dohn wahn im deah no mo, yuh jis take duh bruhm an sweep out quick attuh im. Den sprinkle a lill salt on duh flo weah his foot track bin an sweep em all out duh doe an he sho wohn come back no mo."

At this point in her narrative a swarm of barefoot children, black and with shining eyes, clustered around us. One and all were eating crabs, biting into the soft part of the body shell or cracking a claw with strong white teeth. Word had evidently just gone out that some excitement was brewing. Strangers had come and were talking to "Miz Minnie." If anything was going on they didn't want to miss it.

* *Minnie Dawson, Pin Point.*

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

tions, and a good education does not include the old vocabulary. The children do, however, still learn to speak and understand Gullah: they return home from school and community to extended families where older members are responsible for their discipline and training; the church services are rendered in an elite variety of Gullah; the schoolteachers are from the islands and often chastise the children in Gullah; and most of all, the islanders are in a majority and Gullah, not standard English or a variety thereof, is the accepted language of the community. In the near future, therefore, some version of Gullah will probably continue to exist as the language of the home and of the community.

Finally, the islanders remain as conservative about their culture as they ever were. As I have noted, they are hostile to strangers, and word of outsiders carries quickly. No one, black, white, or otherwise, can escape their cultural interrogations. They will want to know who each newcomer is, and why this person has arrived. But it is not true, I learned, that the islanders will remain hostile. Once one establishes oneself within a community (which often takes years to do), one will receive all possible warmth and hospitality and all the help one might need to carry out one's work.

In writing this book I promised to tell the story of the islanders as I saw it, and to the best of my ability, that is what I have done.

The end of that one!

[p. 150 is blank]

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

from Baptist and Episcopalian masters, and limited contact with black preachers.

The Methodists' systematic religious instruction provided Gullahs with the first opportunity for a uniform type of religious culture. This socio-religious nexus did not vary from plantation to plantation or from island to island. It was based on a moral philosophy, not precluding the preservation to some extent of a continued faith in the customs of African-born forebears. The emerging religious association resembled and gave expression to a world view brought from Africa, common to the Gullahs, and suited to their circumstances. More than any other features of the Christian religion, the Gullahs embraced its moral virtues—humanity, humility, fairness, a sense of the dignity of the sufferer, and belief in the merit of all people. No matter how one regards these values, they are celebrated in Christianity, and it was this spirit in Methodist teachings that the Gullahs accepted. The letter of the law, in a strict Mosaic form, and the Pauline sanction of servitude were rejected. There was little room for internalization of the dogma present in Christianity as taught by whites. That would have negated Gullahs' previous belief patterns and their hatred of bondage. Gullah folk Christianity was an ardently felt religion. It was a religion which elevated them above their masters' efforts to make them contented slaves. Far more than Methodism perhaps, Gullah folk religion was a religion of the heart. Their spirituality helped them channel what was expected to be hopelessness, helplessness, and prostration into the forging and further enrichment of a culture. Through individual stamina, collective faith, and cultural development they merged as a people. Their collective faith kept them spiritually free in spite of physical bondage. Their collective faith, together with spiritual freedom, and matched with natural gifts and talents, provided Gullahs with a will to create, the courage to persevere, and power, as a "prepolitical" people, to use religion as a progressive force and shield against white psychological and cultural domination. This collective faith allowed them to believe in themselves and in their dream of ultimate freedom.[71]

The year 1845 was momentous for the history of slave conversion in South Carolina and for the nation as a whole. At that time the Methodist Episcopal Church South and the Southern Baptist Convention were organized. Both denominations pledged to make a more zealous thrust in Christian instruction of the black population. Also, in May of that year,

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

175
N45
N94
685

"guilty." Theft, for instance, brought many Gullahs before disciplinary tribunals. Of course slaves did steal for consumptive purposes, obviously because provisions were often insufficient and monotonous. To keep cotton at maximum yield, planters sacrificed cultivation of food staples for their workers. Provision acreage was not determined by the slave community's size, but by the numbers of food-acres workers could attend while working cotton. Sam Mitchell, a former bondsman on one of John Chaplin's Ladies Island plantations, considered his master one of the more tolerable slaveholders. Yet Mitchell recalled that slaves received only a weekly peck of corn except at potato-digging time when they also received potatoes. Sam Polite, of John Fripp's plantation on St. Helena Island, also remembered a grim picture of subsistence:

> On Sattiday night every slabe dat wuks gits peck of corn and pea, and sometimes meat and clabber. You nebber see any sugar, neider coffee in slabery. You has straw in your mattress but dey gib you blanket. Ebery year in Christmas month you gits fur or eider fibe yaa'd cloth. . . . You wears hit winter en summer, Sunday en ebery day. You don't git no coat.[11]

175
685
693
• 181

Understandably, Gullahs felt no particular bond toward a "Thou shalt not steal" edict despite supposed spiritual and assured physical reprisals. Certainly the Gullahs realized the sham of such dictates given their peculiar circumstances and oppression. Still Gullahs were not immoral on the subject of theft. Among themselves they took a serious attitude toward theft, considering it a breach of trust. Yet Gullahs felt no compunction about such acts directed toward the slave system. In the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission Interviews, conducted in 1863, Robert Smalls and Harry McMillan, two soldiers, Sea Island residents and former bondsmen, explained the slaves' attitude toward theft. They testified that while the majority of Gullahs stole from their masters and deceived them, these slaves would not steal from each other and were truthful in their dealings with one another. During the Civil War a white officer of the First South Carolina Volunteers told Charlotte Forten, a black Northerner, that he never saw a regiment where men were so honest. "In many camps the colonel and the rest of us would find it necessary to place a guard before our tents. We never do it here," he said. "They are left entirely unguarded. Yet nothing has ever been touched." Similarly, Laura M. Towne wrote in her diary: "The men and women come crowding here at all times begging to be allowed to buy clothing,

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

175 685 693 181

and though they stand about for hours in the sun, we have never missed the slightest thing."[56]

In the benne seed ritual, Gullahs dealt with theft in a spiritual context, under the guise of the Baptist faith. But the moral judgment was the opposite of Christianity. "Sin" was not upon the slave who stole from the master, but the individual who "divulged" the act. Gullahs possessed a keen sense of communal morality which, in this regard, was not subverted by dogmatic features of Christianity. While stealing from "Maussa," was a sin, it was wrong—that is, against elements of collective interests and values—to steal from a fellow slave and hence betray community confidence. Gullahs extended their moral philosophy further than race or condition however, by refusing to steal from whites simply because they were white. But, the Gullahs were not naive. Their shrewd analysis of justice helped them distinguish between friend and oppressor even among white Northern "missionaries." And some white Northern Baptist ministers sent to the Sea Islands during the Port Royal experiment were more avaricious than cotton agents. One Reverend Phillips, on full salary from a missionary organization, also drew a salary from the government as a superintendant of plantations, and was provided with "house-rent and rations." Still, Phillips "demanded," from St. Helena Island Gullahs, "half-a-dollar from every church member for the half year ending January 1." Since some one thousand blacks on St. Helena, claimed membership in Brick Baptist Church, Phillips expected to collect quite a sum. But the Gullahs refused to pay. Other ministers "of like kidney" were dismissed for "lying" and for "stealing" contributions sent to the Gullahs by Northern congregations. On one occasion, Gullahs discovered that James McCrea, a minister representing the American Missionary Association was cheating them. They refused to attend McCrea's religious meetings and refused to labor in the cotton fields he supervised. Likewise, when some government cotton agents on St. Helena charged over 100 percent more for store items than was being charged in Beaufort, these stores were broken into "and robbed of a good deal of clothing."[57]

175 685 693 799 181 794

175 799 794 181

Flight, another problem continually plaguing Sea Island slaveholders and punished by both church and state, was usually provoked by some extreme act of cruelty, or gross injustice. Sometimes slaves left because of a strong desire to visit a loved one. Gullahs rarely ran away with intentions of "going North" for instance. Aside from the near impossi-

17 567 181

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

17
567
•181

bility of such an accomplishment, an intense love of family and deep attachments to familiar surroundings kept runaways nearby. Perhaps even more than any other slaves in the United States, Gullahs maintained a clan-type kinship community, and in their isolation clung tenaciously to these relationships. This attitude was also expressed toward their plantations. Those Gullahs able to purchase small twenty-acre plots of land during the Port Royal experiment, resisted buying on any plantation other than their "own." They thought "it was as bad as slavery if they had to leave their old homes." Yet as slaves, Gullahs ran away frequently and bad treatment was the leading cause for absence. Treatment was also a recurring theme in Gullah songs, as indicated by this slave worksong related by Sam Polite:

17
567
533
[539]

I wuk in field on Maussa Johnnie Fripp plantation. Sometime we sing w'en we wuk. One song we sing ben go lak dis:

"Go way, Ole Man
Go way, Ole Man
W'ere you bin all day
If you treat me good
I'll stay 'till de Judgment day,
But if you treat me bad,
I'll sho' to run away."[58]

17
567

Not all masters were cruel. For example, the Gullahs represented "Capt. John" Fripp as a kind man. Still, his "whipping post" was within twenty feet of the "drawing-room." The tree, "a sprawling Asia-berry," covered with grey moss, "looked wiered enough." "Capt. John" reportedly never "licked" hard nor struck "in the same place twice." Fripp's houseman, Dick, only recalled getting one "hard" flogging, when he watered the old man's garden with seawater. However, his wife, the cruel one, liked "to stand at the window to see the floggings," administered by "Driver Moody," when "Capt. John" was away. Thomas Chaplin of Tombee Plantation was tough enough, and threatened his slaves a great deal. He was also an insensitive master in regard to selling slaves, unable to believe blacks had the same familial loyalty as white people. He wrote in his Journal, "cowhide was all talk with me." But one must take such a comment skeptically since he frequently had his drivers do the flogging. Chaplin was not remembered by his slaves for excessive cruelty nor for kindness.[59]

Rarely could a Sea Island slave boast, as one did, that their backs "stan

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

17
533
(539)

Jesus make de blind see,
Jesus make de cripple walk,
Jesus make de deaf to hear.
Walk in, kind Jesus!
No man can hinder me.[19]

175
533
971

When Laura Towne heard this impressive spiritual, she believed the refrain "no man can hinder me" meant that "nothing could prevent access to Jesus." Yet Charles Nordhoff, a journalist sent to Port Royal in 1863 to write about Sea Islanders, heard the song and immediately attributed it to "an aspiration for liberty."[19] Certainly there were elements of truth in both interpretations—a combination of mystical belief in the miraculous powers of the Christian God and a deep, sense of freedom—a heritage from the African past. Higginson heard Gullah soldiers sing the song and noted that they sometimes substituted "hinder me" with "hinder we." But he failed to attach any significance to this, merely stating that it was "more spicy to the ear, and more in keeping with the usual head-over-heels arrangement of their pronouns." Despite the perception and usefulness of Higginson's book, it also contains a disturbing air of condescension toward the Gullahs which was typical of some abolitionists. Although he attested to the Gullahs' daring and coolness in combat, thus affirming their equality with whites in terms of courage, he failed to credit them with having any intellectual complexity in their modes of expression. He recognized Gullah soldiers' physical strength but overlooked aspects of their character which bespoke of higher emotions, unless these could be interpreted in a strictly Christian sense. Hence Higginson viewed the Gullahs' songs as "thoroughly religious," and the attitudes contained in them as "always the same, and, as a commentary on the life of the race, . . . infinitely pathetic. Nothing but patience for this life,—nothing but triumph in the next."[20]

175
901
533

175
•181
901
533

Gullahs were a proud people who did not indulge in self-pity and would have resented being seen in a piteous light by their friend and supporter. Life for the Gullahs was an uphill battle but not without grace and nobility. Higginson sometimes failed to grasp this, despite his close relationship with Gullah soldiers and their families. One can imagine the thoughts of Gullah soldiers as they sang and contemplated that their treasured expectation was becoming a reality. Substitution of "we" for "me," possibly represented feelings of nationalism which had developed over a period of generations when social and cultural traditions

175
533
186

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

175
533
539

We'll soon be free,
We'll soon be free,
We'll soon be free,
When de Lord will call us home.

My brudder, how long,
My brudder, how long,
My brudder, how long,
"Fore we done suffrin' here?

It won't be long (thrice)
'Fore de Lord will call us home.[23]

569 Slaves in Georgetown were jailed at the outbreak of the war for singing this spiritual. As a little drummer boy explained to Higginson, "Dey tink *de Lord* mean for say de Yankees." Higginson doubted that the slaves made the same association of which their masters thought them capable. Once again he reveals his nineteenth-century "romantic racialism." But no one could mistake the plaintive meaning in the following song, first heard at Hilton Head Island and said to have been a song "to which the Rebellion had actually given rise":

No more peck o' corn for me,
No more, no more,
No more peck o' corn for me,
Many tousand go.

No more driver's lash for me,
No more, etc.

No more pint o' salt for me,
No more, etc.

No more hundred lash for me,
No more, etc.

No more mistress' call for me,
. . . .
Many tousand go.[24]

181
771
569

Thus, while God, personified as Jesus, offered Gullahs an explanation for life and provided a model of virtue, as did their African God, this was not an abjuration of human existence. Their religion contained a

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

181 • 771 567

fervent zest for life. As slaves, the cornerstone of their faith rested on confidence that freedom on earth would not be denied them and their progeny. One missionary wrote of how the Gullahs expressed this:

> As they spoke of their trust in the Savior, his assurances, by the application of the promises to their hearts, that "a good time was coming" when their own vines and fig trees would cast their shadows around them in quietness and safety, and no more parting of families be known, our hearts dissolved in sympathy and gratitude in their behalf.[23]

Christianity can be interpreted in fatalistic terms. But to believe Gullahs totally accepted a submissive Christian posture suggests that they did not struggle against the cultural domination that masters attempted to impose through religion. To say, on the other hand, that an element of patience was not present in their form of Christianity would be a denial of historical reality. Resolution of the contradiction may come through understanding the limited role of doctrinal Christianity in Gullah life and thought, and taking a fuller cognizance of the influence of previous traditions. Practically and theologically speaking, Gullahs were not resigned to their condition, and not uncritical of religious teachings. Nor were they beguiled by insipid attempts to "make them better slaves." From their African heritage Gullahs retained optimism—a proclivity to make the best of their near-tragic situation for the sake of communal spirit and future generations. This was more meaningful than blindly striking out and committing racial suicide. The simple issue of the practicality of insurrection must also be considered. They had learned from Vesey and others, perhaps implanting the Charleston insurrection attempt in their memory. They believed armed rebellion was impossible as long as they were enslaved. Higginson stated that he often pondered over why the Gullahs' "daring and endurance" in combat had not manifested itself in armed insurrection against the slavocracy. Predictably, Higginson attributed the lack of large-scale rebellions to "the peculiar temperament of the races, in their religious faith, and in the habit of patience that centuries had fortified." But Higginson added that to have kept "the land in a perpetual flame of insurrection" would have been impossible for a number of reasons:

> The shrewder men all said substantially the same thing. What was the use of insurrection, where everything was against them? They had no knowledge, no money, no arms, no drill, no organization. . . . They had no mountain passes

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

181
567

to defend like the Maroons of Jamaica,—no impenetrable swamps, like the Maroons of Suriname. Where they had these, even on a small scale, they had used them,—as in certain swamps round Savannah and in the everglades of Florida, where they united with the Indians, and would stand fire—so I was told by General Saxton, who had fought them there—when the Indians would retreat.[26]

Priceless energy and humanity would have been the fruits of rebellion as far as the slaves were concerned. Such physical confrontations would have left little enthusiasm for cultural creativity. Thus does the quest for examples of physical courage often overshadow a valiant spiritual temper. Gullahs maximized their creative talents, developing a socioreligious collective derived perhaps from the most edifying features of two traditions. In this way they maintained their dignity and provided a legacy of the truest examples of valor and vitality. They maintained a passionate love of humanity so that they could confront their former masters with an absence of revenge. But as Higginson noted, they also possessed a deep sense of progressive rationalism in their calm realization that masters and slaves are natural enemies. In observing the Gullahs' capacity to endure pain and tendency to look beyond their own individiual situation, the surgeon in Higginson's black regiment referred to the men as "natural trasncendentalists."[27] This was true to some extent. Yet a more accurate characterization could be that these African-Americans were natural humanists. For them, integration of the human personality on a collective level was central, so that cultural considerations received primary attention sometimes at the expense of practical ones.

While the African tradition from which Gullahs descended emphasized preservation, protection, and enrichment of life, the phenomenon which unified this anthropocentric philosophy was religion. Hence it is not difficult to understand why Gullah life was expressed from an essentially spiritual perspective. Christianity and traditional African religion combined to provide them with an ideology of freedom, and a noble, mystical explanation for their existence as a people. They internalized the optimism in both religions and both orientations were necessary ingredients in the creation of Gullah culture. Slavery did not erode the African sense of pride, of community, love of home, and of family. Yet who knows how long these attributes could sustain cultural life among slaves, no matter how much their spirits struggled against degradation? Christianity offered the additional cohesion needed to develop a homogeneous people and a society based upon a progressive religious nation-

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

alism. Consequently, religion cannot be viewed only or primarily as a source of visionary, spiritual fulfillment. Nor can religion be mainly viewed as manipulative. For Gullahs it offered a politic for collective consciousness and group conformity within an African-Christian synthesis.

Freedom was not attained as the 1822 conspirators had invisioned. When freedom came, years later, a New rather than Old Testament ideology partly gave meaning and fruition to that liberty. As Leon Litwack points out, few triumphs in the spirit of freedom could equal the day in 1865 when in Charleston, a cornerstone was laid for a new African Methodist Church. It was over forty years after the old wooden structure in Hampstead had been destroyed. The new church was to be built by black hands. The architect was Robert Vesey, son of Denmark.[28] In 1822 freedom under the banner of "A Chosen People" eluded black South Carolinians through no fault of those who made the supreme sacrifice. Yet who could fault the Gullahs and perhaps other African-Americans in 1865, as they regarded themselves if not as a chosen people, at least as the "chosen generation" of a "peculiar people?"

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

Mr. Esau Jenkins

SOMETIMES WE UNDERESTIMATE THESE PEOPLE

464 The people on Johns Island, those that are not working in the city or as domestics, most of them make their living off truck farms on the island. Especially the women. They work on the farms of plantation owners. They pick snap beans, they dig white potatoes, they pick tomatoes, pack cabbages, spinach and whatnot. Those are the things that they depend on for a living.

During the winter months they go into a hardship because most of the farms don't have anything to do. That's the hardest time that they have to face.

•18 (891 855 231) Sometimes we underestimate these people and forget they have something we really need. These are people who haven't gotten a college education, or even a high school education. But anyone able to raise twelve children—and raise 'em healthy too—must know something good. They were smart enough to plant and to raise the kind of thing the children need. They raised their own hogs, they raised their cows, they had the milk with vitamin D what they need.

Some of these older people thought very deeply. Mother-wit and faith in God helped them to do a lot, and some achieved more than some of the young people who have been able to go to college.

6: Smith I,Y-5 (no date) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

121 Consequently, as more Black parents seek knowledge of their
855 West African heritage and strive to rear their children in
178 an African framework, the potential contribution of Sea Island child rearing research is evident.

181 The Sea Islander is known in contemporary Black folk-
121 lore as funny talking and quick to fight. The other view is that the Sea Islander is extremely religious and quick
[621] to pray. Perhaps the single most recurring report is of the cultural cohesion of Sea Island communities. It is this cohesiveness which makes Sea Islanders a unique source for research on discipline behavior.

121 Certainly the relative isolation of Sea Island commu-
621 nities adds to the possibility that its inhabitants would
861 have similar life histories, beliefs and attitudes. These factors have been shown to act as correlates of discipline behavior. The cohesiveness of the Sea Island communities suggest that the Islanders may have similar predispositions toward discipline. Consequently, the Gullah people are a unique source of data of the effects of antecedent conditions on discipline behavior.

121 In the continued absence of systematic data on Sea Island family systems, it may be difficult for significant numbers of Black parents to develop clear conceptions of child rearing within a West African heritage. Hence, before undue emphasis is placed on direct comparisons of West

8: Smith Q-4,5 (no date) 1926
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

175 fields, the lonely rice marshes, the windy pine-woods, the dying rice-fields, on the little truck-farms and cotton patches of the lowlands, they remained eking out an existence as best they could, almost as untouched by civilization as if they had still been dwelling in the forests of equatorial Africa.

• 181 Thus with the passing years, owing both to origin and environment, they have come to constitute a highly specialized group among the Negro population of the South. In common with other Negroes they share in the main Negro characteristics, but in them these characteristics are sharply heightened and accentuated. They are almost unbelievably primitive, childlike, excitedly religious, ignorant, illiterate, humorous, shrewd, shiftless beyond expression, superstitious, unstable, likeable, loyal, full of a homely untutored philosophy, gifted with picturesque speech, humble, kindly, generous, good-natured, and entirely without malice. It hardly need be said that they likewise possess in high degree the universal Negro trait of having two quite separate and distinct sides, one for the white race and one for themselves.' Living close to nature they are

---

[567] case of Thomas Hamilton Couper of 'Hopeton' on the Altamaha River is an example. Sir Charles Lyell, recognising him as a distinguished fellow-naturalist, paid him a long visit in 1846 and made laudatory notes upon the library, the household, and the plantation with its five hundred slaves. Another pen has left an account of his burial in 1866, after his death in poverty and despair:

'The steps of the church were broken down, so we had to walk up a plank to get in; the roof was fallen in, so that the sun streamed down on our heads; while the seats were all cut up and marked with the names of Northern soldiers, who had been quartered there during the war. . . . . The funeral party arrived. The coffin was in a cart drawn by one miserable horse, and was followed by the Couper family on foot, having come this way from the landing, two miles off. From the cart to the grave the coffin was carried by four old family negroes, faithful to the end.' Ulrich B. Phillips, "Plantations With Slave Labor and Free," *American Historical Review*, July, 1925.

'This trait is of critical importance. The Negro is a superlative actor and pantomimist, and lets the white man see and know just what the Negro wishes him to—and no more.

Failure to take this into account leads to strange conclusions. It is the reason why so many visiting observers, even though earnest and sincere, have received and recorded impressions of the Negro in the South that are highly plausible—and more highly erroneous.

[113] For a shrewd and cynical summing-up of the case, see L. M. Hussey's "Homo Africanus", *The American Mercury*, Jan., 1925. See also Howard W. Odum and Guy B. Johnson, *The Negro and His Songs*, University of North Carolina Press, 1925, pp. 6 and 9.

Following are three well-balanced expressions on this point, two looking to the

8: Smith Q-4,5 (no date) 1926
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

•181 learned in woodcraft and the ways of animals and birds and fish, and in quaint similes and shrewd sayings use this knowledge to illustrate their dealings with their own kind, and their relations with the outside world.

177 In increasing measure, however, good roads, bridges, and free rural schools are bringing in outside influences and the processes of civilization. The numerous hunting clubs in winter and coast resorts in summer are likewise increasing their points of contact with the rest of the State. They are being slowly transformed and conformed, becom-

---

181 present, the third looking toward the past: (1) William Pickens, himself a Negro, says: "Till this day the Negro is seldom frank to the white man in America. He says what he does not mean; he means what he does not say. . . . This is one reason for the great misconception in the white race respecting the desires, ambitions and sentiments of the black." *The New Negro, His Political and Civil Status and Related Essays*, p. 37.

(2) Mr. Gonzales says: "Of all the inscrutable peoples of the Eastern world, none is more secretive than the Negro, nor any so puzzling to the psychologist, for while it is easy to know that deceit lurks behind the mask of engaging frankness with which he seeks to disarm those who doubt him, the exact nature of the deceit can seldom be discerned." Review of Charles C. Jones, *Negro Myths from the Georgia Coast*.

(3) Dr. Stanhope Sams, literary editor of "The State", looks to the Negro's past: "There is a dark region beyond the mind and soul of the Negro of the slave plantations that may never be explored. No trained and well equipped psychologist, so far as I know, has ever attempted this magnificent research. Certainly none of the Negro students of the race has seemed to get even so near as white students have approached. So far as I have ever seen in their writings or heard in their speech, Dubois and Booker Washington did not enter that primeval jungle. And it is not possible now, perhaps, to 'restore' this primitive jungle race and lore. It would be a far more difficult task than the restoration of Kish or Ur, or to bring back to earth some semblance of the mysterious Sumerians. There we have at least a tablet or stele or monument to help; but we must decipher the Negro of the days of the Pharaohs and of Carthage and of the impenetrable backward and abysm of time that stretches like an uncharted sea behind the African Negro from the modern Negro in America or Africa.

"At all events, as it seems, the contact he must have had with cultured Egyptians and Carthaginians left no enduring record. It is possible—despite some vague beginnings of civilization in certain parts of Black Africa—that the only lasting betterment in conditions the Negro has yet known or held has been received during and since he became a slave in the Southern States.

"It remains an alluring, but a chimerical adventure—this attempt to learn what the Negro was before his contact with us.

"On their own part, the Negroes seem to have formed a conspiracy of silence. Possibly they suffered too profoundly, were hurt too bitterly, to tell us their own story. They preferred, doubtless, to leave it behind them in the engulfing and obliterating jungle. They must have known, must have remembered, those first slaves, and they have always had the genius for story-telling and singing. Yet they tell no stories that reveal their previous march, sing no songs—except with borrowed music, and fill their mythologies with the animals and beings of the world that bound and enslaved them."

8: Smith Q-4,5 (no date) 1926
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

533
•181

Nor must it be forgotten that the Negro is both a splendid actor and a born dramatist: he dramatizes a situation concretely and vividly, and dramatizes himself and his own feelings with equal facility.

All of these factors are to be taken into consideration when dealing with the origin of the spirituals.

But however originated and compounded, spirituals constitute one of the most distinctive additions of the Negro to the culture of America. A leading Negro publicist[1] sums up his race's contributions somewhat as follows: the cake-walk, jazz music, the animal folk-tale, the Blues, and the spirituals. In the minds of many the greatest of all are the spirituals.

[1] James Weldon Johnson.

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

CHAPTER TWO

African Survivals on the Coast of Georgia

123 There are survivals of African songs on the coast of Georgia. But let no outsider imagine they can be heard for the asking. From experience I know this to be true. It took me three winters on St. Simon's to hear a single slave song, three times as many winters to see the religious dance called the ring-shout, still more winters to unearth the Buzzard Lope and similar solo dances, and the game songs known as ring-play. It may be only a coincidence, but the "funny songs" with African words, translated by Dr. Lorenzo D. Turner, have been the last to be found. They were discovered about the time Negro educators began to teach their pupils that the term African was not synonymous with barbarism, and that Africa had a culture of its own.

• 181 The secretiveness of the Negro is, I believe, the fundamental reason for our ignorance of the race and its background, and this trait is in itself probably an African survival. Melville J. Herskovits bears out such a conclusion when he quotes a Dutch Guiana Bush Negro as saying: "Long ago our ancestors taught us that it is unwise for a man to tell anyone more than half of what he knows about anything." [1] It is amusing to question Southerners as to the number of times they remember hearing Negroes volunteer information. Not one so far has recalled an instance in which something has been told that was not common knowledge.

181 829 This inborn reticence, coupled with the fact that natives of Africa remember little about their forebears farther back than their grandparents,[2] is undoubtedly responsible for the race's lack of a past in either the Old World or the New. It is possible, however, that there may be a cause for their apparent forgetfulness of which the white man is unaware. On Sapelo I got the distinct impression from two descendants of Old Bilali, the famous Mohammedan slave, that the dead were dead,

[1] *Handbook of Social Psychology.*
[2] Mentioned by Clement Egerton in African Majesty.

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

and that it was safer to let them lie. If you talked about them you might be stirring up trouble for yourself. In Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird* the grandparents came to life when memory recalled them; it may be that the West Africans entertain something of the same belief.

Only by fitting together apparently unrelated parts have I been able to advance a reasonable explanation for our ignorance of the Negro's history and of his private life. He has been in America nearly as long as the white man, yet how much do we know about him? Precious little. We learn of his migrations by inference. Where the pioneering white man went—first South, then West—there went the Negro slave to break the ground.[3] He is mentioned—that is all. From accounts given by travelers in Africa, it is evident that they find out no more about the home life of the native than the interpreters choose to have them know, and in America this same reserve is as persistent a characteristic as is the color of the race or its frizzy hair. Southern planters grow up with certain trusted Negroes, without dreaming that they may be skilled in some particular direction. It was interesting to watch the face of one of them, Uncle Scotia, when he saw the Buzzard Lope—for the first time in his life—done by a Negro woman he had known for more than fifty years. If he had heard about the dance and inquired—as I did—"Can you do it?" she would undoubtedly long before have obliged him. I must reiterate that the importance of knowing what questions to ask cannot be overestimated.

How much of the hands-off policy of the early plantation owners was due to their own lack of initiative, and how much to the silent pressure which the black race knows so well how to employ, had best be left an open question. Southerners say that a college education is of no avail when pitted against the cleverness of the Negro; and I know of too many instances in which the colored man has outwitted the white, to doubt that assertion.[4] But whoever originated segregation[5] and the regime described in 1829 by Captain Basil Hall in his *Travels in the United States*, the Negroes' passion for secrecy was fostered. Captain Hall quotes the owner of a rice plantation on the Combahee River as saying: "We don't care what they do when their tasks are over—we lose sight of them till next day. Their morals and

[3] In considering the distribution of the slave songs this historical fact must be kept in mind. The Negro carried his songs with him, and I am convinced that they did not return against the tide of migration to any great extent.

[4] Just as in the Uncle Remus tales, Brer Rabbit always outwits Brer Fox.

[5] Mary H. Kingsley, in West African Studies, tells us that among the Bantus the slaves live in villages apart from their masters.

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

their manners are in their own keeping. The men may have, for instance, as many wives as they please, so long as they do not quarrel about such matters." And, I notice, Southerners on our coast still tacitly observe this tradition.

When I began the work of actively retrieving slave songs, and instituted "sings" at the Cabin in front of my cottage, I found it expedient to follow the same procedure. The group—silently, be it remembered—made it clear that such matters as jail sentences and surplus wives were their affair, whereas my concern was limited to their music, although anything—such as drinking, "soldiering," or insubordination—which interfered with its proper presentation was distinctly within my province.

As a concrete example of the lengths to which the Negro carries his reluctance to give information, I can do no better than tell how Julia taught me a valuable lesson: never take anything for granted. After being my laundress for three winters, she became my cook in 1915, and for the fifteen years in all she enjoyed a precious secret. With her as intermediary I was able to hear the slave songs. She never sang a note on my place, and I assumed that she could not. But in 1927, at Mrs. Arnold's funeral, her dramatic moment arrived. With the group she had brought to my door, she stood beside the open grave, and she sang as well as the others. When I periodically ask why, in all those years, she never told me she could sing, she smiles quizzically, but says nothing. Perhaps she does not know herself.

However, it is just possible that an age-old compensation complex explains the situation. I am convinced that the average Negro enjoys intensely knowing something that the white man does not, and the exquisite delight he derives from realizing that the white man has been bested in a little game makes up for any loss or indignity he may be obliged to endure. Julia's game was innocent and her loss was financial, but that such tactics may have a less pleasant side—aimed at the eventual discomfiture of an exacting employer—it may be well to remember.

Before leaving the subject of the Negro's secretiveness, it may be well to consider this racial characteristic in relation to another that is quite as often mentioned by travelers in Africa: dread of derision.* It seems to me that the attitude of the whites toward the blacks has never been calculated to encourage the latter to parade their Africanisms. The slave trader's need of justification, and our ignorance of Africa and its culture, enabled him to persuade us that Africans were barbarians in

*Fear of ridicule enables African blackmailers with a gift of clever improvisation to collect tribute from their thin-skinned brothers—for the songs they do not sing.

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

need of our "civilizing" influence.[7] The success of his propaganda is reflected in the words of Fanny Kemble, who wrote in her *Journal* that "all tongues—the most vulgar, as well as the self-styled most refined—have learned to turn the very name of their race into an insult and a reproach." Evidence of its pernicious effect on the Negroes themselves is also given by Sir Charles Lyell in his *Second Visit to the United States* (1845–1846). He asserts: "It is a good sign of the progress made in civilization by the native-born colored race that they speak of the Africanians with much of the contempt with which Europeans talk of Negroes." To the truth of these statements I can testify. I was cautioned as a child never to use the term African in the presence of our colored people for fear of hurting their feelings. Need we be surprised that the Negro denied all knowledge of Africa—even as Peter denied all knowledge of Christ!

Colored people are not the simple-minded, insensitive individuals (Illustration 9)[A] that certain Southerners lead us to imagine when they jauntily say: "Negroes are like children and must be treated accordingly." As in every race, there are immature minds, but in my experience they size us up far better than we do them. I am inclined to agree with an observant Georgian who told me: "They know us better than we know ourselves." In consequence it seems to me advisable to make no definite assertions about the race, yet we do need every hint which will enable us to avoid such pitfalls as trap those unsuspecting souls who believe what they are told. Since Fanny Kemble's time we have seen in print all too many instances of the way the psychic Negroes obligingly tell unsuspecting listeners exactly what they wish to hear. Also, like their African cousins, our colored people are born actors; and an outsider with a pet theory about them can find ready confirmation of almost any notion.[8] The inquisitive college professor is particularly vulnerable, and when he becomes authoritative he is giving the Negro the opportunity he relishes above all things to laugh up his sleeve at the white man's gullibility.

Not all Negroes are like this. Some are loyalty itself; others hold themselves

[7] As late as 1902, Joseph A. Tillinghast, in The Negro in Africa and America, speaks of the "benighted savagery" of the African Negro and stresses the vast superiority of European culture. In the light of what is happening in Europe today, it seems to me wiser to say little about the blackness of the pot.

[8] From Fanny Kemble's account of her contact with her husband's slaves, it is ironically evident that they were the better actors. Their performance was so perfect that it carried conviction, and added to the difficulties encountered by Pierce Butler in his attempt to make a living out of his plantations.

A. [For Illustration 9, see Category 142, plate facing p. 64--Analyn]

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

aloof, and never lose a chance to mislead and to poke fun at the white man behind his back. But I have noticed that they often reflect the treatment meted out to them in slave days. Geoffrey Gorer, in *Africa Dances*, calls attention to this fact: "If you can watch a man dealing with negroes you have no need to ask his opinion about them; and if you can watch a man's negroes you will know the chief points of his character. They mirror their masters faithfully and terribly." This approach has always interested me, and I have traced the ancestry and former ownership of many of our Glynn County Negroes. Cusie [9] Sullivan provided me with a striking exemplification of Gorer's statement. His good manners excited my curiosity, and when I encountered his father, Ben, at a Negro funeral, they were explained. Mrs. Shadman, who had known Cusie's grandfather, Bilali, gave me his history. He was the butler at the Couper plantations, at Cannon's Point on St. Simon's, and at Hopeton on the Altamaha River. The courtesy of the three generations of Sullivans known to Mrs. Shadman is a tribute to the genuine distinction of the Couper family.[10]

However, the self-respecting dignity [11] of this group of Negroes undoubtedly had its roots in Africa. Sir Charles Lyell devotes considerable space to a description of life on Hopeton plantation and to "African Tom." [12] Lyell tells us: "Under the white overseer, the principal charge . . . is given to 'Old Tom,' the head driver, a man of superior intelligence and higher cast of feature. He was the son of a prince of the Foulah tribe [West Soudan], and was taken prisoner, at the age of fourteen, near Timbuctoo. The accounts he gave of what he remembered of the plants and geography of Africa have been taken down in writing by Mr. Couper, and confirm many of the narratives of modern travelers. He has remained a strict Mahometan, but his numerous progeny of jet-black children and grandchildren, all of them

[9] *In West African Studies, Miss Kingsley says that among the Fanti Negroes a boy born on Sunday is called Quisi.*

[10] *By the same token, one of my most helpful singers—Ben Davis—who was trained from early childhood by Mrs. Shadman, mirrors the thoughtful dependability of her character.*

[11] *Egerton, in African Majesty, makes it very clear that he was impressed with the great dignity and presence of the uncle of the King of Bangangté in the French Cameroons. The many wives of the King also excited his admiration: "They were dignified, self-possessed and definitely regal."*

[12] *Professor James A. Grant of Darien, tells me that his great-grandfather, Thomas (called Carcastone among his own people), was a driver on the Couper plantations. In his youth he had heard his grandfather, Thomas (brother of the Couper's Bilali), say that he was named for his father who was an African prince and a Mohammedan. Apparently "African Tom" and Bilali's father, Thomas, were one and the same.*

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

181 569 175 marked by countenances of a more European cast than those of ordinary negroes, have exchanged the Koran for the Bible. . . . During the last war [1812] when Admiral Cockburn was off this coast with his fleet, he made an offer of freedom to all the slaves belonging to the father [John Couper] of my present host, and a safe convoy to Canada.[13] Nearly all would have gone, had not African Tom, to whom they looked up with great respect, declined the proposal. He told them he had first known what slavery was in the West Indies, and had made up his mind that the English were worse masters than the Americans. About half of them, therefore, determined to stay on St. Simon's Island, and not a few of the others who accepted the offer and emigrated had their lives shortened by the severity of the climate in Canada."

Z. Kingsley, in his *Treatise on the Patriarchal Form of Society*, published some time before 1829, cites "two instances to the southward [of Charleston], where gangs of negroes were prevented from deserting to the enemy by drivers . . . and what is still more remarkable, in both instances the influential negroes were Africans, and professors of the Mohammedan religion." It is clear that Kingsley had (212) John Couper's "Old Tom" in mind, and that the other Mohammedan was Spalding's Bilali,[14] whose so-called *Diary*, written in Arabic, on Sapelo Island, is now in the possession of the Georgia State Library in Atlanta. Pages from the *Diary* have been incorporated in the end-paper designs of this book.

212 569 This manuscript has aroused keen interest among anthropologists, and the photostatic copy I sent to Melville J. Herskovits has been translated by Joseph Greenberg.[15] During the summer of 1939 Mr. Greenberg visited Northern Nigeria, under the auspices of the Social Science Research Council, and through his fluent knowledge of Arabic won the confidence of educated Malams in the city of Kano. They assisted him in deciphering certain parts of the "diary" and in locating the places in an important Mohammedan legal work [16] from which most of the manuscript derives. It is amusing that the first result of Mr. Greenberg's study was to

[13] Admiral Cockburn harried our coast during the War of 1812, and as late as January, 1815, destroyed the orange orchards on Cumberland Island.

[14] Charles S. Wylly, in Seed Sown in Georgia, tells us how, in 1803, his grandfather, Thomas Spalding, relied upon Bilali to aid in the protection of his property on Sapelo with its "five hundred slaves, many fresh from . . . Africa."

[15] A résumé of the results of his work has been published in the Journal of Negro History, July, 1940.

[16] The Risala of 'abu Muhammad 'abdullah b. 'abi Zaid 'alquairawani.

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

763 764 171 spot long enough to find out many fascinating things about Africa's black residents, mentions the fact that "In the cold wet months it is inconvenient to have . . . a [funeral] feast, and if some one dies at that time of year, the feast is often postponed until the dry season."

793 796 539 Negro preachers—particularly those who possess good voices and a store of spicy proverbs—often deliver sermons and offer prayers that stick in the mind. One I heard in Liberty County (the one whom I thought afflicted) expatiated on the subject of sin. He made it clear that certain types were worse than others. "Sin is a mean thing," and his tone was scornful; but when he said: "Self is a terrible thing!" it was thunderous and convincing. In a barn of a church in Camden County the substance of the preacher's prayer was in these touchingly earnest words: "We're down here, Lord, chewin' on dry bones an' swallerin' bitter pills. We can't do nothin' without You." Whatever may be said about the emotional character of the religion of our American Negro, it must be conceded that his sins are of the flesh rather than the spirit. He is generous with his last crust, and there would be no need of orphanages if white people, in proportion to their means, adopted as many children as colored people.

771 •18

175 569 191 When it comes to terse economy of speech we are obliged to concede that no one can equal the Negro. Mrs. Annie Arnold, born on St. Simon's in 1844, gave me the perfect example of this fact in recounting a bit of local history. A cargo of slaves of the Ebo tribe had been landed at a suspiciously secluded spot on the west side of the island. They preferred death to a life of captivity, and as they walked into the water the leader said: "The water brought us here. The water will take us away." No one but an African could have expressed such poignant unhappiness in so few words. In view of the fact known to traders that the Ebo men made poor slaves and were prone to suicide,[33] the account is probably true. The Negroes believe the story, and to this day they have to be extremely hungry to fish by themselves at Ebo Landing. One night a few years ago some colored boys braved tradition, and went 'possum hunting in the neighborhood. I have my own ideas as to the real cause of their terrifying experience, but the fact remains that no others have been tempted to repeat it.

175 569

Sir Charles Lyell tells us that "The slave trade ceased in 1796, and but few negroes were smuggled into Georgia from foreign countries, except indirectly for

[33] For this reason as few as possible were accepted by the traders.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

567

lieve. Whipping made a rebellious and sullen slave who shirked his work and stirred up trouble. This was the reason that a driver was permitted to inflict stripes only in the presence of the overseer and that some planters forbade whipping altogether. No driver on the Butler plantation on St. Simon's Island was permitted when R. King was overseer to inflict punishment until after a regular trial. "When I pass sentence myself," said King, "various modes of punishment are adopted; the lash least of all,—Digging stumps, or clearing away trash about the settlements, in their own time; but the most severe is, confinement at home six months to twelve months, or longer."[8] All planters admitted that punishment was necessary in order to carry on the plantation routine; it was inherent in the system of slave labor; but the lash was the least effective mode.

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

567
181

Before 1860 it had frequently been pointed out by travelers in the South and by masters themselves that the coastal Negroes, especially the sea-island Negroes, were less advanced culturally than the "Up-Country," or Piedmont Negroes, because they had less association with civilizing forces. It was evident to even a casual observer that on the sea-island cotton plantations, where the slaves had contact with few whites except the overseer and his family and but little intercourse with the slaves of other islands or even of other plantations on the same island, they must remain more stationary than where they equaled in number the whites or even formed a minority, as was true in a large part of Piedmont South Carolina.

[8] *Southern Agriculturist*, Dec., 1828, p. 524.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

569
181

Sir Charles Lyell even found a difference in the cultural development of the various sea-island Negroes. Those on the smaller plantations on St. Simon's Island were, for instance, more civilized than those on the larger estates.[9]

When Edward L. Pierce visited St. Helena Island in 1862 to observe the plantation conditions as an agent for the Federal Government, he arrived at the conclusion that slavery had bred out of the Negro all manly qualities. They had become "an abject race, more docile and submissive than those of any other locality." They did not want to fight; they did not want to be uplifted; they wanted to be left alone. "Nowhere has the deterioration of the Negroes from their native manhood," he wrote in an article for the *Atlantic Monthly*, "been carried so far as on these Sea Islands,—a deterioration due to their isolation from the excitements of more populous districts, the constant serveillance of the overseers, and their intermarriage with one another, involving a physical degeneracy with which inexorable Nature punishes disobedience to her laws."[10]

569
177

On St. Helena Island, where there were some two thousand slaves to a little more than two hundred whites, the Negroes learned very slowly the ways of the whites. Their mastery of English was far less advanced than that of the Piedmont slaves. They spoke a garbled English, imperfect words and expressions which they and their parents and grandparents had learned from the few whites with whom they came in contact. Their speech mystified the northern missionaries who came to the Island

569
191

[9] Lyell, *Second Visit to the United States*, I, 268.

[10] *Atlantic Monthly*, Sept., 1863; also in E. L. Pierce, *Addresses and Papers*, p. 106.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

after the Federal occupation in 1861. Arthur Sumner, from Cambridge, Massachusetts, tried to describe to his cousin their way of speaking. "These negroes speak with an inarticulate jabber. The sounds roll around in their great chops, and come pouring out through their huge mouths, so that I find it easier to understand a foreign language than confused utterance. Their idioms, too, are funny. I told Byron, a boy who waits upon me, that I was going to distribute clothing on his place. 'Talk *we* house?' said he:—meaning, 'Are you speaking of our house?' . . . Byron came to me with a message from his mother—'Ma says if you give her some trade'—Imagine such a sentence uttered as if it were a word of many syllables. Can you make it out? . . . 'Ma wants to know if you will give her some thread?'"[11]

These missionaries from the North, who, of course, knew nothing first-hand of slavery, thought that the St. Helena Negroes were the most degraded and backward of all the coastal slaves in the South.[12] After the northern whites had become acquainted with other sea-island Negroes from such places as St. Simon's Island, Georgia, and Edisto Island, South Carolina, who were quartered temporarily on St. Helena Island by the Federal Army, they were still of the opinion that the St. Helena slaves were the most retarded in the South except those on the sugar plantations in Louisiana. Arthur Sumner wrote late in 1862, "The Georgia and Florida negroes are vastly superior in appearance, character, and intelligence, to the natives of these Islands. It is the testimony

[11] Arthur Sumner Papers. Port Royal, May 18, 1862. The last word was pronounced as if spelled tred, not trade.
[12] *Letters from Port Royal*, p. 181.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

of all those who knew the South, that the colored people of the Sea Islands, are the lowest grade of Negroes in America. I'm sure I hope I shall never see a worse set than those who live on our part of St. Helena Island."[113] Miss Harriet Ware, who had been conducting a school on St. Helena, concluded in 1863 that "as a general thing the Edisto people are a better class of blacks, more intelligent and cultivated, so to speak."[114]

It is not surprising that the St. Helena slaves should have been less advanced than those even of neighboring islands, for as it has already been pointed out, St. Helena Island was one of the most isolated of the Sea Islands. It is a buffer from the Atlantic for two other large islands, and the Island itself is cut up into various small islands by the broad tidal creeks which interlace it. It is likely that at least half of the more than two thousand slaves who inhabited St. Helena in 1860 had never been off the Island, for Beaufort was difficult to reach and only the most privileged were allowed to go there. Shut off from contact with the outside world, they were thus unfamiliar with many of the cultural traits of the whites which had sprung up since their own forebears had become "tamed."

It is remarkable, then, that the slaves should have achieved as much of the culture of the whites as they did. They were quick to learn from the few whites with whom they were thrown and from the house servants who went back and forth with the master's family from the Island

[113] Arthur Sumner Papers. Dec., 26, 1862.

[114] *Letters from Port Royal*, p. 150. See also the opinion of Charles P. Ware, *ibid.*, p. 97; of W. C. Gannett, *ibid.*, p. 178; and see James S. Pike, *The Prostrate State: South Carolina Under Negro Government*, ch. XXXII; Whitelaw Reid, *After the War: A Southern Tour*, p. 94; Hazard Stevens, *The Life of Isaac Ingalls Stevens*, II, 354.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

against teaching slaves to read had long been in abeyance when Sunday schools began to be organized among them early in the ante-bellum period. Masters usually encouraged their people to attend these Sabbath schools and often delegated their own children to do the teaching. The reaction against the Abolition agitation led many planters to fear the consequence of their people's learning to read. Accordingly, the Sunday school movement was largely abandoned after 1835; nevertheless, on every plantation there were always some slaves who either were taught to read with the permission of the master or who picked up the knowledge clandestinely. Miss Towne found on St. Helena Island in 1862 a cabinet maker, Will Capers, who could read and write and who hoped the Government would pay him for teaching his fellows. He told her that he conducted a secret night school for men during plantation days.[64] Nevertheless, it was unusual for a slave to know his letters, and most of them could not count beyond, "one, two, five, eight, ten."[65]

For the most part, sea-island planters found their laborers mild and forgiving, quick to start a quarrel, but as quick to forget it. Sir Charles Lyell thought that there were more broken heads among the Irish in a few years when they came to dig the Brunswick Canal than had been known among the coastal Negroes for half a century.[66] They were a good natured, happy people, making the most of their lot, forgetting the work of the day in their hours of "pleasuring."

[64] *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, p. 27.

[65] Towne, "Pioneer Work on the Sea Islands," *Southern Workman*, July, 1901. Miss Towne, however, could not have come in contact with the house servants, but only with the field hands.

[66] Lyell, *Second Visit to the United States*, I, 266.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

175 657 658 891

When the Government abandoned Pierce's plan of training the Negro for citizenship with the sale of plantations in 1863, it did not give up the idea of teaching them to read and write. Some plantations and parts of others were set aside as school farms, the profits of which were to be applied to the education of the people. Later when Congress ordered the sale of the school farms in 1866, it provided that the money arising from the sale should be invested in United States bonds and be appropriated to "the support of schools, without distinction of color or race, on the islands in the parishes of Saint Helena and Saint Luke."[49]

175 659

Pierce, in his "Second Report to the Secretary of the Treasury," declared that the movement which he had inaugurated had exceeded his "most sanguine expectations." "Industrial results have been reached, which put at rest the often reiterated assumption that this territory and its products can only be cultivated by slaves. A social problem which has vexed the wisest approaches a solution."[50] The superintendents, however, were by no means willing to concede as much. Philbrick wrote in 1862, "I don't believe much can be made out of this generation by free labor, nor out of the next without teaching them to read."[51] In 1863 W. C. Gannett thought their state of morals "decidedly better than it was under slavery—less of licentiousness, lying, and stealing,—and more general manliness and self-respect." "But," he added, "they are very far behind, in character as well as intelligence, and I

175 659 181

[49] *U. S. Statutes at Large*, XIV, chap. CC, sec. 8.
[50] "Second Report," *Rebellion Record*, sup., I, 323.
[51] *Letters from Port Royal*, p. 110.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

175
E57
181.

suspect that most abolitionist views of their character are exaggerated in their favor."[52]

THE LAND SALES

175

Congress by Act of August 5, 1861, levied an annual tax of $20,000,000 on all the states and territories for the purpose of conducting the war, of which South Carolina's quota was $363,570.66.[53] To collect the tax in the eleven insurrectionary states, Congress passed an act, June 7, 1862, calling for the appointment of direct tax commissioners. Collections were made in all the southern states during the war and after its close either by voluntary payment or by sale of land. Commissioners sold land for the non-payment of taxes in Virginia, Florida, Arkansas, Tennessee, and South Carolina, but in every state except that of South Carolina the lands were bid in at the tax sales by the commissioners for the United States. The presence of the northern missionaries in the region of the tax sales altered the situation in South Carolina.

The commissioners for South Carolina, W. E. Wording, W. Henry Brisbane, and A. D. Smith, having been appointed, ordered the first sale of land to take place at Beaufort, February 11, 1863. The land to be sold was that in St. Helena's and St. Luke's parishes in Beaufort District, the area occupied by the Federal Army, and included the whole town of Beaufort. Many friends of the Negro both at Port Royal and at the North objected to a sale under the Act of June 7, for they wanted some special

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 241.

[53] By Act of Congress approved July 1, 1862, the operations of the Act of August 5, 1861, were suspended until April 1, 1865, except for the collection of the first annual tax, and by Act of June 30, 1864, it was further suspended until additional legislation.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

175 433 511

ered extravagance. They lived better, clothed themselves better, and worked fewer hours than in slavery days, but they had not yet crystallized themselves into industrious and orderly communities.

WAS FREEDOM TOO EASY?

175

In 1865 Philbrick had not yet sold all of his eleven plantations. Besides his holdings, there were several other plantations on St. Helena owned and operated by men from the North. The Government, too, was still leasing the school farms to white overseers. Most of these men, employers of Negro labor, superintendents and teachers who had witnessed the transition from slavery to freedom, were of the opinion that freedom had been made too easy for the Negro.

175 567 659 181

Charles P. Ware, who had been an assistant superintendent under Philbrick for the Government and later remained on St. Helena to help Philbrick carry through his scheme of training the Negro for citizenship with private funds, wrote in despair at the beginning of the harvest season, the first year of emancipation, "The untrustworthiness of these people is more apparent and troublesome than ever. I feel as if it would not be safe to allow them to gin the cotton—it seems certain that a great deal of it would be stolen." He then set down the characteristics of the Negroes which made it so difficult to deal with them as laborers: "Their skill in lying, their great reticence, their habit of shielding one another (generally by silence), their invariable habit of taking a rod when you, after much persuasion, have been induced to grant an inch, their assumed innocence and ignorance of the simplest rules of

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

175
567
657
181

meum and *tuum*, joined with amazing impudence in making claims,—these are the traits which try us continually in our dealings with them, and sometimes almost make us despair of their improvement—at least, in the present generation. It is certain that their freedom has been too easy for them,—they have not had a hard enough time of it. In many cases they have been 'fair spoiled.'"[8]

175
657

Arthur Sumner, who had come to St. Helena in 1862 as a teacher, seriously questioned the wisdom of the Government's policy toward the Negro in the early days of the Federal occupation of Port Royal and came finally in 1865 to believe that the Negroes' friends at the North had done the freedmen a grave injustice by protecting them against "natural economic laws." He wrote from St. Helena in February, 1865:

> I am exasperated (and so is every other white man in this place) at the mischievous indulgence shown to the negro. It is a common remark here, that "a white man can get no justice." This inhumane leniency is doing a great deal of harm, in many ways. It is teaching them to despise the laws, and to believe that Liberty means License. It is creating in the minds of the white people a very bitter feeling against the blacks, which, of course, is mutual. If Justice had been shown to both parties, from the beginning there would, I believe, have been far less antagonism. There will always be, however, until the blacks are as intelligent and well-educated as the whites, a contempt felt by the latter, and dislike and distrust by the former. It is so here and must be so everywhere. The negro has always been oppressed by the white man, and knows that even now he has it in his power, from his superior intelligence and acquirements, to cheat him. Even the best of the young men sent down here by benevolent societies at the North, have failed to gain their confidence. . . . The Black has got a long struggle before

[8] *Letters from Port Royal*, p. 287.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

175
527

Decoration Day was the one occasion of the year when all of St. Helena paid a visit to Beaufort, where there was always a ceremony at National Cemetery. "The Thirtieth of May," said a native of St. Helena, born in the early days of freedom, "was a day that I looked for [*sic*] to happiness. Early in the morning work was suspended and nearly all the people on the Island went to Beaufort. I can now recall how I used to watch with interest the great crowd that used to pass by our house from the other end of the Island on the eve of Decoration in order to be over in town before the rush. We had to cross a ferry then and the accommodation was not very good."[84]

[505]

[567]

The people of St. Helena celebrated the First of January not so much as New Year's Day as the anniversary of their freedom, for it was January 1, 1863, that President Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation. Here again the celebration was at Corner Store. Brass bands, perhaps one hired for the occasion and another composed of members of one of the fraternal orders, furnished music for the day. On a platform erected in a grove of trees, speakers, usually chosen from among their own people, addressed an attentive audience upon the benefits arising from freedom.

175
517

The freedmen had no sports as did the whites in the rural districts. They still fished as in slavery days and could now hunt when they chose, but they did not know how to play together in combative sports. Yet they were a good-natured, contented people, happy in their freedom, ignorant in their isolation, suspicious of all "foreigners," but gentle and courteous when once this suspicion had been

175
181

[84] MS, "St. Helena." In files of Penn School.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

975.8
[533]
1997

allayed. Their folk-ways were the outgrowth of slavery; their songs, the ones they sang in bondage; their speech, the English their ancestors had learned when they were "tamed." But their home was one of the proudest of the Sea Islands, about whose history there is a glamour scarcely equalled in the new world. The object of French colonization, a Spanish presidio, a Scotch settlement, the home of the lone Indian trader and frontiersman, a center of indigo culture, the heart of sea-island cotton production, the scene of southern culture at its height, and one of the densest black belts in the South, this region had finally become suddenly and dramatically the home of the black people who had tilled the land and whose labor had made many of these things possible.